

# Embracing the Institutional Mission: Influences of Identity Processing Styles

Lauren A. Milner, M.S.  
Joseph R. Ferrari, Ph.D.

## Abstract

Previous research suggests that different information processing styles influence how effectively students adapt to a college environment. During the college years, individuals shape and refine their values and principles while they also develop a life-long philosophy. The present study examined how student ego-identity development ( $n = 1,249$ ) was influenced by institutional values of social justice and engagement at an urban, Catholic institution. Results suggested that students with information-orientation and normative-orientation identity processing styles demonstrated an understanding of the institutional mission during their undergraduate years. In contrast, students with a diffuse-orientation identity processing style did not necessarily develop a strong sense of the mission. These findings indicate that Catholic universities may need to implement programs to reach out to individuals with a diffuse identity processing style.

A university is often considered a setting for students to develop and transform during late adolescence. Previous research suggests that different cognitive processing styles may influence how effectively students adapt to a college environment.<sup>1</sup> *Identity style* refers to relatively

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Lauren Milner was a Research Specialist at DePaul University, Chicago, IL, and is currently a Doctoral Student at University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR; Joseph Ferrari is Professor of Psychology and Vincent de Paul Distinguished Professor, DePaul University, Chicago, IL. The authors express gratitude to Fr. Ed Udovic, Georgianna Torres Reyes, and Tom Drexler for their support. Portions of this project were presented at the 2009 annual meeting of the *Eastern Psychological Association* (Pittsburgh, PA).

<sup>1</sup> Michael D. Berzonsky and Gerald R. Adams, "Reevaluating the Identity Status Paradigm: Still Useful After 35 Years," *Developmental Review* 19 (1999): 557-590; Michael D. Berzonsky and Linda S. Kuk, "Identity Style, Psychosocial Maturity, and Academic Performance," *Personality and Individual Differences* 39 (2005): 235-247; Anne Constantinople, "An Eriksonian Measure of Personality Development in College Students," *Developmental Psychology* 1 (1969): 357-372; Alan S. Waterman, et al., "Longitudinal Study of Changes in Ego Identity Status from the Freshman to the Senior Year at College," *Developmental Psychology* 10 (1974): 387-392.

stable differences in how students make decisions, solve personal problems, and process identity-relevant information.<sup>2</sup> For many decades, most researchers of identity formation processes utilized Marcia's<sup>3</sup> distinction in identity statuses model. This model was based upon the presence or absence of *identity commitments* (degree of personal investment in values, beliefs, and character traits) and *active self-exploration* (level of examining one's morals, attitudes, beliefs, and virtues). Different ego-identity statuses emerge through commitment and self-exploration.<sup>4</sup>

Berzonsky<sup>5</sup> identified three different identity processing orientations or styles: information-orientation, normative-orientation, and diffuse-orientation. According to Berzonsky,<sup>6</sup> *information-oriented* individuals question their self-views and postpone making judgments until they are able to process all relevant information. Previous research demonstrated that an informational identity orientation is positively associated with self-reflection, problem-focused coping efforts, experiential openness, and identity achievement.<sup>7</sup> An information processing style entails an orientation to explore, actively seek out, process, and evaluate self-relevant information.<sup>8</sup> Information-oriented individuals report having experienced a crisis that has led to self-exploration and are committed to their ideologies after exploring all possible outcomes.

Individuals with *normative-oriented* identity processing style tend to solve conflicts by conforming, in a relatively automatic manner, to expectations that have been set up by family, friends, and/or significant others.<sup>9</sup> These individuals are likely to be more intolerant of ambiguity and to rely strongly on structure. Persons with a normative processing

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<sup>2</sup> Michael D. Berzonsky, "Self-Construction over the Life-Span: A Process Perspective on Identity Formation," *Advances in Personal Construct Psychology* 1 (1990): 155-186.

<sup>3</sup> James E. Marcia, "Development and Validation of Ego Identity Status," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 3 (1966): 551-558.

<sup>4</sup> Michael D. Berzonsky, "Self-Identity: The Relationship between Process and Content," *Journal of Research in Personality* 28 (1994): 453-460; Koen Luyckx et al., "Information-Oriented Identity Processing, Identity Consolidation, and Well-Being: The Moderating Role of Autonomy, Self Reflection, and Self Rumination," *Personality and Individual Differences* 43 (2007): 1099-1111; Elizabeth Aries and Maynard Seider, "The Role of Social Class in The Formation of Identity: A Study of Public and Elite Private College Students," *Journal of Social Psychology* 147 (2007): 137-157.

<sup>5</sup> Berzonsky, "Self-Construction over the Life-Span," 155-186.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Berzonsky, "Identity Style, Psychosocial Maturity," 235-247.

<sup>8</sup> Michael D. Berzonsky, "Adolescent Self and Identity Development in Context," *Journal of Adolescence* 31 (2008): 147-150.

<sup>9</sup> Berzonsky, "Self-Construction over the Life-Span," 155-186.

style characteristically have little desire to explore due to their concern with standards and expectations of the significant others (i.e., parents / authority figures) in their life. Furthermore, these individuals demonstrate resistance against information that challenges or calls into question their currently held beliefs and values.<sup>10</sup> Normative processing individuals typically internalize and conform to the standards, expectations, values, beliefs, and ways of coping set by authority figures and significant others. Normative individuals are committed to their ideologies but have experienced no crisis or exploration.

*Diffuse-orientation* identity processing style is characterized by a reluctance to confront and deal with personal conflicts and decisions. Individuals with a diffuse identity style will tend to procrastinate, and their behavior will be controlled dominantly by situational demands and incentives.<sup>11</sup> Trademarks of a diffuse-oriented identity processing style are procrastination and an avoidance of dealing with personally-relevant issues.<sup>12</sup>

No published study has examined differences among the three identity styles in relation to perceptions of higher education mission. This study proposed that faith-based colleges and universities, with their inclusiveness of different student populations and emphasis on social welfare and social justice,<sup>13</sup> may have an indirect, subtle impact on student development. More specifically, the present study examined how students with different identity processing styles perceived their university's institutional mission, vision, and values.

### *Higher Education Mission Statements*

Organizations publicly proclaim their institution's objectives, expectations, and values through a mission statement.<sup>14</sup> Stemler and

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<sup>10</sup> Berzonsky, "Adolescent Self and Identity," 147-150.

<sup>11</sup> Berzonsky, "Self-Construction over the Life-Span," 155-186.

<sup>12</sup> Michael D. Berzonsky and Joseph R. Ferrari, "Identity Orientation and Decisional Strategies," *Personality and Individual Differences* 20 (1996): 597-606; Michael D. Berzonsky and Joseph R. Ferrari, "A Diffuse-Avoidant Identity Processing Style: Strategic Avoidance or Self Confusion?" *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research* 9 (2009): 1-14.

<sup>13</sup> Jon C. Dalton, "Community Service and Spirituality: Integrating Faith, Service, and Social Justice at DePaul University," *Journal of College and Character* 8 (2006): 1-9.

<sup>14</sup> Barbara A. Holland, "From Murky to Meaningful: The Role of Mission in Institutional Change," in *Colleges and Universities as Citizens*, eds. R.G. Bringle, et al. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1999), 48-73.

Bebell<sup>15</sup> stated that mission statements are unique and reflect the school's ideals and operations. Mission statements are usually brief in length, clear in purpose, and positive in approach.<sup>16</sup> These statements define the institution's purpose, distinctiveness, and future; drive the institution's operations by providing guidelines for day-to-day decision making; and help members connect and identify with the organization.<sup>17</sup> Mission statements are active and are tailored toward moving an organization forward in achieving future goals.<sup>18</sup> Within higher education settings, mission statements focus the energies of employees to balance the relationship between educational goals and the needs of the outside world across diverse stakeholders (e.g., administrators, faculty, and staff). Mission statements help everyone work toward common goals and provide an overarching vision toward which each member may strive.<sup>19</sup> Institutional missions may be conveyed through administrative operations, academic programs and policies, and student services.<sup>20</sup> They identify the institution's intentions to accomplish goals and its premise for action.<sup>21</sup>

A university's mission statement represents the core vision and values the school embodies within the community as well as the values the institution hopes to instill within its students. Colleges and universities with institutional missions that are clearly understood and

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<sup>15</sup> Steve Stemler and Damian Bebell, "An Empirical Approach to Understanding and Analyzing the Mission Statements of Selected Educational Institutions," (n.p., 1999). EDRS Document Reproduction Service No. ED442202. Retrieved on July 12, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> John Carver, "Managing Your Mission—Advice on Where to Begin," *About Campus* 4 (2000): 19-23.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Emery, "Mission Control," *Training and Development Journal* 50 (1996): 51-54; Lion F. Gardiner, *Planning for Assessment: Mission Statements, Goals, and Objectives—A Guide for Colleges and Universities* (Newark, NJ: Rutgers University, 1988); J. Nevan Wright, "Mission and Reality and Why Not?" *Journal of Change Management* 3 (2002): 30-44.

<sup>18</sup> John P. Kotter, "Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail," *Harvard Business Review* (1995): 59-67.

<sup>19</sup> Gary A. Berg et al., *Mission Possible? Enabling Good Work in Higher Education* (Washington, DC: Heldref, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> Joseph R. Ferrari and Shaun E. Cowman, "Toward A Reliable and Valid Measure of Institutional Mission and Values Perception: 'The DePaul Values' Inventory," *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 25 (2004): 43-54.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Ehrlich, "The Impact of Higher Education on Moral and Civic Responsibility," *Journal of College and Character* 2 (2000): 1-11; Daniel J. Rowley et al., *Strategic Change in Colleges and Universities* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

embraced by employees achieve effective strategic planning,<sup>22</sup> marketing, and public dissimulation of the unique characteristics of the institution,<sup>23</sup> future visions for growth and enhancement,<sup>24</sup> and useful assessments of outcomes and goals.<sup>25</sup> In fact, academic departments with mission statements that clearly reflect their institution's vision and values<sup>26</sup> establish ways to reward faculty accomplishments and to hire new instructors based on the institution's mission and values.<sup>27</sup>

For key university administrative stakeholders (e.g., faculty, staff, and administrators), a mission statement may serve as a source of inspiration.<sup>28</sup> A strong mission statement integrates stakeholders in a way that maintains a vital community atmosphere.<sup>29</sup> The most successful and focused campuses are defined by their mission and driven daily by a sense of that mission.<sup>30</sup> Previous research demonstrated that faculty and staff's sense of community with coworkers and administrators was associated with perceptions of the university's mission statement.<sup>31</sup> This finding indicates that a strong mission statement aids in maintaining a healthy work environment, which reduces conflict and allows all employees to excel in their work.

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<sup>22</sup> Bonnie Bourne, et al., "Setting Strategic Directions Using Critical Success Factors," *Planning for Higher Education* 28 (2000): 10-18.

<sup>23</sup> Frank G. Bingham, et al., "A Response to 'Beyond the Mission Statement: Alternative Futures for Today's Universities,'" *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 11 (2001): 19-27.

<sup>24</sup> Donna S. Finley, et al., "Beyond the Mission Statement: Alternative Futures for Today's Universities," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 10 (2001): 63-82.

<sup>25</sup> Carver, "Managing Your Mission."

<sup>26</sup> J.K. Haynes, "Linking Departmental and Institutional Mission," *New Directions for Higher Education* 119 (2002): 65-68; Philip E. Smith, "The Mission of Rhetoric and the Rhetoric of Mission Statements," *ADE Bulletin* 121 (1998): 30-36; James M. Sterns and Shaheen Borna, "Mission Statements in Business Higher Education: Issues and Evidence," *Higher Education Management* 10 (1998): 89-104.

<sup>27</sup> Robert M. Diamond, *Aligning Faculty Rewards with Institutional Mission: Statements, Policies, and Guidelines* (Jaffrey, NH: Anker Publishing Company, 1999); Patricia T. van der Vorm, "The Well-Tempered Search: Hiring Faculty and Administrators for Mission," *Academe* 87 (2001): 34-37.

<sup>28</sup> Robert A. Sevier, "Fine-Tuning Your Mission: Your Mission Statement Can Put You Right on Top of Your Market—or Make You Irrelevant," *Marketing University Business* 6 (2003): 292-295.

<sup>29</sup> Emery, "Mission Control," 51-54; Berg, *Mission Possible?*

<sup>30</sup> Michael J. Adams, "Who Cares About the Mission?" *University Business: Solutions for Higher Education Management* (2008): 27-28.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph R. Ferrari, et al., "Impact of School Sense of Community Within a Faith-Based University: Staff and Faculty Perceptions on Institutional Mission and Values," *Social Psychology of Education* (2008).

Moreover, mission statements provide an opportunity for a university to publicly state its purpose. To be competitively successful, higher education institutions must have a clear identity that distinguishes them from other colleges and universities. These distinguishing characteristics must include the values the university upholds, as well as what programs and policies it will impart to students in comparison to other institutions.<sup>32</sup> Unique characteristics allow higher education institutions to optimize their resources to recruit students and achieve high marks when it comes to student satisfaction.<sup>33</sup> The skills and competencies acquired through higher education that reflect the institution's mission and values may impact student development.<sup>34</sup> For instance, if a Catholic university claims in its mission statement to promote and to foster public service, intellectual integrity, critical thinking skills, moral and civic development, and racial and religious tolerance, then it is important to evaluate whether such virtues are actualized and realized by students.<sup>35</sup> Evaluating how much an institution's mission and values affect new students may be helpful in the review of educational policies and administrative operations as well as in ascertaining the impact of both community-based service programs<sup>36</sup> and identifiable benchmarks of the school.<sup>37</sup>

Many Catholic universities are currently facing the challenge of transitioning to lay leadership and thus making changes in the stakeholders of the institution. This secularization has caused many faith-based institutions to lose their faith-based identities in order to compete with other secular universities. In his book *The Dying of the Light*, Burtchaell<sup>37a</sup> discussed the indirect and slow erosion of institutional

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<sup>32</sup> Mary Belour, "An Analysis of Faculty Perceptions of Their University's Mission: In Their Own Voice" (Masters Thesis, DePaul University, 2006), 1-76.

<sup>33</sup> Finley, "Beyond the Mission Statement," 63-82.

<sup>34</sup> Ferrari, "Toward a Reliable and Valid," 43-54; Ferrari, "Impact of School Sense."

<sup>35</sup> Ehrlich, "The Impact of Higher Education," 1-11; Gardner, John N., "Focusing on the First-Year Student," (n.p., 2001). EDRS Document Reproduction Service No. ED458865; J. Mark Halstead and Monica J. Taylor, "Learning and Teaching about Values: A Review of Recent Research," *Cambridge Journal of Education* 30 (2000): 169-202.

<sup>36</sup> David D. Dill, "Focusing Institutional Mission to Provide Coherence and Integration," *Planning and Management for a Changing Environment*, eds. M.W. Peterson et al. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 171-191.

<sup>37</sup> Ferrari, "Toward a Reliable and Valid," 43-54; Joseph R. Ferrari and Jessica Velcoff, "Measuring Staff Perceptions of University Identity and Activities: The Mission and Values Inventory," *Christian Higher Education* 5 (2006): 243-261.

<sup>37a</sup> James T. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998).



mission and identity statements by the disengagement of private colleges and universities from their church affiliations. Mission statements that once included words like “values, morals, and congregational affiliations” now give way to words like “independent, coeducational, and residential.” Nevertheless, Catholic institutions continue to be a competitive force in mainstream higher education. Furthermore, a study of 350 institutions affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church found these institutions to be as diverse as secular higher education settings.<sup>38</sup>

### *DePaul University*

DePaul University is a Catholic, teaching university with over 23,000 students educated across several metropolitan campuses in the Chicago, IL area. DePaul University was founded in 1898 upon Vincentian values, emphasizing academic excellence, service to the community, access to education and respect for the individual.<sup>39</sup> Deriving its name from St. Vincent de Paul, DePaul University treasures its deep roots in the wisdom and the traditions that have been promoted by Catholic universities through the ages. The university’s benchmark characteristic is as an “*urban, Catholic, and Vincentian*” institution, and DePaul University expresses its vision through the values inherent to these concepts. DePaul states that it expresses its *Catholic* identity by direct service to the poor and economically disenfranchised through such programs as engaging students, faculty, and staff in volunteer and community service directed at impoverished areas.<sup>40</sup> Murphy<sup>41</sup> noted that, although DePaul is a Roman Catholic school of higher education, its institutional uniqueness emanates from a *Vincentian* identity incorporating respect for human dignity, for diversity, and for individual “personalism.”<sup>42</sup> The *urban* identity of the University is expressed by connection and outreach to the community. Its connections include delivering quality education to locations in and immediately around the metropolitan area of the city of Chicago and to the global community.

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<sup>38</sup> A.M. Greeley, *From Backwater to Mainstream: A Profile of Catholic Higher Education* (New Jersey: McGraw-Hill, 1969).

<sup>39</sup> DePaul University, “DePaul’s Mission,” <http://www.depaul.edu/about/mission/index.asp> (accessed May 20, 2008).

<sup>40</sup> Louise Sullivan, *The Core Values of Vincentian Education* (Niagara, NY: Niagara University Press, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> J. Patrick Murphy, *Visions and Values in Catholic Higher Education* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1991).

<sup>42</sup> Sullivan, *The Core Values*.

The present research investigated the relationship between student identity processing style and students' perception (independent of any socially desirable responding) of a Catholic university's mission, vision, and values that incorporate civic and social engagement as well as a commitment to personal spirituality development (i.e., at DePaul University). Because an informational processing style is characterized by an individual's tendency to explore, actively seek out, process, and evaluate self-relevant information,<sup>43</sup> we expected that these individuals would have spent more time exploring the mission of their university. Normative-oriented individuals largely depend on the opinions of others, while diffuse individuals avoid any exploration and commitment.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, we expected the relationship between identity processing style and perception of the institutional mission would be stronger for individuals with an information-orientation identity style, as compared with individuals who report an identity style of either normative-orientation or diffuse-orientation.

## Method

### *Participants*

Initially, a total of 1,706 students (1,070 female, 616 male;  $M$  age = 21.61,  $SD$  = 5.49) from the entire undergraduate student population responded to an online survey relating to mission and value perceptions of students. Participants consisted primarily of Caucasian students (62.8%). The number of students was equally distributed by academic year across the sample: 404 freshmen (24.0%), 433 sophomores (25.5%), 392 juniors (23.0%), and 446 seniors (26.1%).

From this total population, 1,249 students clearly identified as one of the three identity processing styles. Since an individual's processing style may be seen as a continuum, some students did not identify as dominantly one processing style, consistent with the classification system used by Berzonsky. Following the categorization process of Berzonsky,<sup>45</sup> a participant's highest  $z$  score on each of the three scales was used to classify his or her identity style. Of the participants, 455 (26.7%) were categorized as having an *information-oriented style*, 346 (20.3%) a *normative style*, and 448 (26.2%) a *diffuse-oriented style*. Of the original

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<sup>43</sup> Berzonsky, "Adolescent Self and Identity," 147-150.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Berzonsky, "A Diffuse-Avoidant Identity," 1-14.



1,706 subjects, 457 students did not score strongly on any of the three orientations; consequently, these individuals were not included in any further analysis. Thus, a total of 1,249 students (774 female, 462 male,  $M$  age = 21.54) comprised the final sample in the present study.

### *Psychometric Scales*

#### DePaul Mission and Values Survey.

All participants completed Ferrari and Velcoff's self-report instrument called the *DePaul Mission and Values (DMV)* scale.<sup>46</sup> This scale comprehensively evaluated perceptions of an urban, Catholic, religious-order-sponsored university's mission, identity, and activities. More specifically, the *DMV* investigates whether or not stakeholders perceived benchmark characteristics and related programs reflecting the Catholic, Vincentian, and urban tenets summarized in the mission statement. By focusing on these three specific domains, this inventory assessed two separate but related components of the university's mission effectiveness. One component focused on perceptions of the *institution's identity*. Ten of these items focused on whether respondents perceived the university as *inclusive and innovative*, reflecting the belief that the institution is innovative in operational procedures, is inclusive of persons from all backgrounds, takes risks in an entrepreneurial way, is pragmatic in educational focus, remains relevant in a changing society, keeps its urban identity, and fosters mutual understanding and respect for others (author  $M$  score = 63.18,  $SD$  = 9.16; coefficient alpha = 0.76). An additional six items reflected the *Catholic pluralism* aspects of the mission, relating to the university's goal of inviting all faiths to examine Catholicism and other faiths, of providing curricula on Catholicism and other faiths, and of offering ministry and programs for Catholicism and other faiths while expressing its primary religious heritage (author  $M$  score = 27.65,  $SD$  = 4.52; coefficient alpha = 0.79).

The second component of the *DMV* assessed perceptions of the *university's mission-driven activities and programs* reflective of its identity through the vision and values of the school. *Mission-driven activities and programs* consisted of twenty-three items, each rated along a 4-point scale (1 = *not at all important*; 4 = *very important*). The first subscale, *urban and global engagement*, included eight items that asked the importance of expressing the mission-driven activities within the metropolitan area, as well as in global settings (e.g., study abroad programs

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<sup>46</sup> Ferrari, "Measuring Staff Perceptions," 243-261.

and having international campus sites and students; author  $M$  score = 26.52,  $SD$  = 4.56; coefficient alpha = 0.86). The *Vincentian heritage* subscale included nine items that focused on a variety of activities which DePaul University has implemented to further promote the university's mission on campus, such as Annual Vincentian Lectures, Authors at Lunch presentations, and Vincentian Assistance Fund for student financial emergencies (author  $M$  score = 26.61,  $SD$  = 5.89; coefficient alpha = 0.89). Finally, the *Catholic and other faith-formation programs* subscale included six questions that reflected the importance of faith-based activities, such as Catholic and interfaith worship services, religious education and spiritual programs, and sacramental and other faith worship (author  $M$  score = 19.98,  $SD$  = 4.94; coefficient alpha = 0.86).

#### Identity-Processing Style.

Participants also completed Berzonsky's<sup>47</sup> 40-item *Identity-Style Inventory* to measure three distinct identity processing styles the students self-identified, namely information-orientation, normative-orientation, and diffuse-orientation. All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = *not at all like me* and 5 = *very much like me*. This measure will determine if there are any significant differences in the perception of the university's mission based on the student's identity style.

There were eleven items that addressed *information-orientation* identity style. A sample question included: *When I have to make a decision, I like to spend a lot of time thinking about my options*. Nine items addressed *normative-orientation* identity processing style. These items included statements such as *I find it best for me to rely on the advice of close friends or relatives when I have a problem*. Ten items addressed *diffuse-orientation* identity processing style; examples included, *I'm not really sure what I'm doing in school; I guess things will work themselves out*. The individual's *identity-commitment* was also addressed by nine items within the measure. Identity commitment items included statements such as *Regarding religious beliefs, I know basically what I believe and don't believe*.

#### Social Desirability.

In order to control for any possible socially desirable tendencies, all participants completed Paulhus' *Balanced Inventory of Desirable*

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<sup>47</sup> Michael D. Berzonsky, "Identity Style Inventory (ISI-3): Revised Version," *Unpublished measure* (State University of New York, Cortland, NY: 1992).

*Responding (BIDR)*. This scale is a 40-item measure, which has two subscales: *self-deception* and *impression management*. Because of the length of the survey in its entirety, participants only completed items that dealt with impression management. Impression management measures a subject's tendency to deliberately answer in a socially desirable manner. Considering the sensitive nature of our survey, we considered this to be the most likely tendency when dealing with socially desirable responses. Items were scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Not True* to 7 = *Very True*. The 20-item impression management scale (coefficient alpha = 0.67) included statements such as *I sometimes tell lies if I have to* or *I always obey laws even if I'm unlikely to get caught*.

### *Procedure*

The university's Office of Mission and Values administered an on-line survey to the entire undergraduate student population. All undergraduate students at each of the six campuses received an email inviting them to participate in the present study. Students were offered incentives to participate through a raffle for one of six free four-credit hour tuition waivers (approximate value: \$2,000). The raffle also included several smaller prizes, such as \$25 gift certificates from Amazon.com and iTunes. Respondents were assured that their responses would be confidential and were provided with an Internet link to the online survey. After six weeks, another solicitation email was sent to the entire undergraduate student population asking again for their participation. The survey was available online for an additional two weeks before being closed for data analysis.

On average, the entire survey was completed within 30-40 minutes. Surveys were counterbalanced in order to control for ordering effects. After completion of the survey, students were debriefed and given contact information in case they would like further information on the study. Participants were thanked for their time and entered into the incentives raffle.

### **Results**

Preliminary analysis revealed a tendency for students to respond in socially appropriate ways across the five *DMV* subscales: innovative and inclusive,  $r = .134, p = .000$ ; Catholic pluralism,  $r = .117, p = .000$ ; urban / global engagement programs,  $r = .051, p = .038$ ; Vincentian heritage programs,  $r = .155, p = .000$ ; and faith-formation programs,  $r = .155,$

$p = .000$ . Even though the correlation coefficients were significantly related, their magnitude was rather small. Nevertheless, to evaluate identity orientation style differences across the five *DMV* subscales, a *one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA)*, controlling for social desirability, was conducted. It was proposed that students with an informational identity style would report a significantly higher perception of the institutional mission, vision, and values as compared with individuals who report an identity style of either normative-orientation or diffuse-orientation.

Table 1 presents the mean scores of the five *DMV* subscales across the three identity styles. There was a significant difference for information-oriented individuals on each of the five subscales: innovative and inclusive,  $F(2, 1,128) = 3.58, p = .028$ ; Catholic pluralism,  $F(2, 1,135) = 4.64, p = .010$ ; urban/global engagement programs,  $F(2, 1,193) = 22.21, p = .000$ ; Vincentian heritage programs,  $F(2, 1,197) = 4.78, p = .010$ ; and faith-formation programs,  $F(2, 1,173) = 6.94, p = .001$ .

*Post hoc* comparisons (Least Significant Difference) were then performed. Across each of the different identity processing styles (independent of social desirability), data suggested that students with an informational-identity style did demonstrate a significantly higher perception of the mission than diffuse-oriented individuals across each of the five subscales. Furthermore, normative-oriented individuals reported a significantly higher perception of the institutional mission, vision, and values compared to diffuse-oriented individuals on each of the subscales, with the exception of urban / global engagement programs. Moreover, contrary to our hypothesis, there were no significant differences found between individuals with an information-oriented processing style and a normative-processing style (see Table 1).

## Discussion

The present study examined how students with different identity processing styles perceived their Catholic university's institutional mission, vision, and values. We hypothesized that the relationship between identity-processing style and perception of the institutional mission, vision, and values would be stronger for individuals with an information-orientation identity style as compared with individuals who reported an identity style of either normative-orientation or diffuse-orientation. Results, however, indicated that while information-oriented students do demonstrate a stronger understanding of the mission than diffuse-oriented individuals, they do not differ significantly

**Table 1.** Mean Score on each DePaul Mission and Values subscale for Students  
Identity Processing Style

	IDENTITY PROCESSING STYLE			<i>F</i> ratio
	INFO ( <i>n</i> = 455)	NORM ( <i>n</i> = 346)	DIFF ( <i>n</i> = 448)	
Innovative & Inclusive	55.73 <sup>a</sup> (10.93)	54.88 <sup>a</sup> (10.93)	52.94 <sup>b</sup> (9.76)	3.58*
Catholic Pluralism	33.57 <sup>a</sup> (6.21)	32.94 <sup>a</sup> (6.65)	31.72 <sup>b</sup> (5.88)	4.64**
Urban / Global Engagement Programs	30.02 <sup>a</sup> (4.18)	28.08 <sup>a,b</sup> (5.23)	27.84 <sup>b</sup> (5.34)	5.21***
Vincentian Heritage Programs	22.58 <sup>a</sup> (5.67)	22.21 <sup>a</sup> (5.77)	20.84 <sup>b</sup> (6.47)	4.79**
Faith-formation Programs	24.91 <sup>a</sup> (9.07)	25.79 <sup>a</sup> (8.48)	22.77 <sup>b</sup> (9.14)	6.94***

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  Value in parenthesis is standard deviation.

Note: INFO = informational identity style; NORM = normative identity style; DIFF = diffusive identity style. Superscripts with different letters are significantly different (*LSD*,  $p < .05$ ).

from normative-oriented individuals. These results suggested that students with information-orientation and normative-orientation identity processing styles report similar understandings of the institutional mission during their undergraduate years. However, students with a diffuse-identity processing style do not necessarily encompass a strong sense of the mission. While the findings do not support our full hypothesis, they are consistent with the supposition that college students with a diffuse-identity processing style do not engage within the university's mission.<sup>48</sup>

### *Implications for Catholic Higher Education*

The present study provides evidence that Catholic universities need to develop programs specifically designed to capture and to engage individuals who are characterized as being controlled by situational demands and incentives.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, when working with diffuse-oriented students, Catholic higher education should implement situations and experiences which lead these students to a higher understanding of

<sup>48</sup> Berzonsky, "Identity Style, Psychosocial," 235-247.

<sup>49</sup> Berzonsky, "Self-Construction Over the Life-Span," 155-186; Ferrari, "Impact of School Sense."

the institutional mission. To better reach all students, higher education officials should explore new methods for introducing information pertaining to the university's mission. For instance, mandating a first year seminar class or providing students with a mentoring program may be two useful modes of promoting the institutional mission.

### *Limitations of the Present Study and Future Directions*

There were several limitations to this study that must be considered. The sample in this study consisted of late adolescents, from the same university, who were willing to participate in the online survey.<sup>50</sup> This may limit the generalizability of our results. Future studies might expand this research to other faith-based higher education institutions. Furthermore, it would be interesting to look at differences between Catholic and non-Catholic institutions in terms of students' perception of the institutional mission.

Although the present study provides evidence that diffuse-oriented individuals do not demonstrate a strong understanding of the institutional mission, it is important to consider that students' identity-processing style is constantly changing as they progress through their undergraduate years. A longitudinal, repeated-measures study examining the relationship between identity-processing style and perception of the mission over time would be one way to evaluate this relationship in future research.

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<sup>50</sup> E.P. Garvey, et al., "Test-Retest Reliability of Personality Scales Administered on Paper and via Web-Based Software" (Presentation, Eastern Psychological Association Meeting, Pittsburgh, P.A., March 7, 2009).